Freeholder Robert J. Vanderslice Majority Speech Salem County Freeholder Reorganization January 8, 2014

Good Evening Everyone and welcome. Thank you Lt. Governor for participating in tonight's reorganization and thank you for being here and for being a "good friend" of our County.

I would like to thank our 3rd District Legislators for making themselves available and for their genuine interest in Salem County. I would also like to congratulate them on the recent reelections. Senate President Steve Sweeney, Assemblyman John Burzachelli, and Assemblywomen Celeste Riley.

I would like to ask all of the family members of the Freeholder board to stand . . .

Freeholder Ware - Congratulatory remarks

Freeholder Director Acton – Special personal reflection

Story: Idaho sheep rancher was approached one day by a stranger in a suit. He said, "If I can guess how many sheep you've got, may I have one?" Thinking this to be impossible the rancher agreed. "You have 1,795 sheep." Stunned by the correct answer the rancher told him to choose his sheep. The man selected an animal and slung it over his shoulder and started to walk away. The rancher said, "hey, if I can tell you who you work for can I have that animal back?" "OK," said the stranger "You work for the government." "How did you figure that out?" "Well, put my dog down and I will tell you."

There is not much respect for government in America today. In fact, according to a recent poll done by the Associated Press, Americans entered 2014 with a profoundly negative view of their government, expressing little hope that elected officials can or will solve the nation's biggest problems.

Here in Salem County, we set out just two years ago to take our County down a road; a road that would include some "new sights and some familiar sights." A road; to borrow some words from Robert Frost, "We took the road less traveled by."

We made it our **Mission** "to enhance Salem County resident's quality of life by ensuring the safety, prosperity and wellness of our communities through responsive, innovative and fiscally responsible actions."

We adopted a **Vision** "to provide the citizens of Salem County the highest quality of life by promoting: Public Safety; Fiscal Responsibility; Economic Development; Culture and Diversity; Health and Education; and Preservation of Natural Resources."

So, what about FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY . . . in my world fiscal responsibility is synonymous with the Prudent Man Theory - The Prudent Man Theory directs trustees "to observe how men of prudence, discretion and intelligence manage their own affairs, not in regard to speculation, but in regard to the permanent disposition of their funds, considering the probable income, as well as the probable safety of the capital to be invested." In other words – When you're investing or spending other people's money, you do it as if it were your own.

In the years prior to the "new majority", the TOTAL COUNTY TAXES APPORTIONED TO SUPPORT THE BUDGET rose from under \$35 million to just over \$50 million. An average increase of approximately \$1.7 million per year over 10 years. In the past two years, in the midst of great economic adversity, the TOTAL COUNTY TAXES APPORTIONED TO SUPPORT THE BUDGET rose from \$50,144,000 to \$51,568,000. An average increase of \$712,000 (less than half).

Understand, that over the past three years the loss in TOTAL ASSESSED VALUE OF LAND AND IMPROVEMENTS (ratables) has been astronomical. Which makes the average increase in the total tax levy since this majority has taken control even more astonishing.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY!!!!!

When we took over the majority we said we would not only reduce the size and cost of county government, but we would look for ways to enhance REVENUE not affected by county taxes.

And while we sought ways to do that, we became aware of Gloucester County's decision to close their jail and have inmates housed in adjoining counties. Our Sherriff, Chuck Miller, took the bull by the horns and negotiated an agreement that enhanced revenue by over \$3 million for 2013. But Sherriff Miller didn't stop there, in keeping with our commitment to maximize revenue, he further negotiated that Salem County become the processing center for ALL Gloucester County

commitments; thereby enhancing the revenue by another \$1.5 million. So kudos to Sherriff Miller and company for their outstanding efforts.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY!!!!!!

With that, let me say that much of what has been accomplished in this area would not have been possible without our Chief Financial Officer - Katie Coleman. She is by far the best government finance person around . . . bar none!

Katie represents the epitome FISCALLY RESPONSIBILE!!!!!

Another area that has been a priority is to bring a variety of people to the table to discuss ways to expand the counties efforts in the area of Economic Development.

Economic development, by text book definition, generally refers to the sustained, concerted actions of policy makers and communities that promote the standard of living and economic health of a specific area.

While many municipalities have created economic development initiatives, The County has taken a new approach by forming The Salem County Economic Development Council. The SCEDC is a group of business leaders, educators, government officials, and agriculturalist committed to moving Salem County in the right direction.

What we have learned, especially in this economic climate, is that it is going to require *patience*. Regular meetings have taken place and the outcome of those meetings has been two areas that we would like to focus on in the year ahead:

Agri-manufacturing – The plan is to develop a Center for Agricultural Profitability. It encompasses several focus areas which include marketing, financial management, product development and on farm energy sources. The other focus is on grain and forage (hay) marketing. The plan would include use of the Salem Port and railroad to transport product and add value to existing grain and hay commodities.

A Technology Corridor – It is important to note that a solid business strategy is the first critical path item for success, but isn't enough on its own. Once the business strategy is established, other critical path items must be effectively addressed. The idea of a technology corridor is in its nascent stage and will require the assistance of the communications industry and our state officials to come to fruition.

We will continue to do everything possible during this weak national and state-wide economic recovery to promote Salem County - its location, its educated work force, and it's willingness to do whatever it takes.

There is much more that can be said about:

- Improvements in our roads and bridges
- Upgrades to the county railroad system
- Completion of vital infrastructure
- More transparency
- More accessibility
- More reliability
- . . . there just isn't enough time.

And so, our commitment to the stakeholders of Salem County is to continue doing what we have been doing all along. The kind of commitment that is found in the Old Testament when the Prophet Micah asked, "What does the Lord require of you? *To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God*."

A personal story about a canning jar the jar of homemade apple sauce was given to me by Maggie Maxwell Mood. She said, "You've had a tough year, so I wanted to give you this." She told me that the ingredients included apples, cranberries, honey, and a little salt. What she didn't say was that there was "love" in there . . . there was "kindness" in there. And, I think that it is important that we Pass it Forward. So, tonight I have brought some of my wife's homemade grape jelly to share with my fellow Freeholders. Love and Kindness . . . pass it forward.

One final word . . . It is for everyone in the audience and for every member of the Freeholder board – "**Don't let anyone define who you are** . . . only God can define who you are!"